

Address
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One of the things that became evident to me as Surgeon General is that any time I made a pronouncement; I divided the listeners into pros and cons. That same phenomenon was true when I spoke to captive audiences at a lecture; people drew sides. I took comfort from one fact. More people were disturbed by my pronouncements than they were about the way I arrived at them. In other words, they might not like what I said, but they usually gave me credit – especially the press – for having come to my conclusion in a thoughtful, ethical way that supported what I had taken an oath to do – support the health of the public.

Pornography, of course, would never be an exception to this rule, but would perhaps be one of its most blatant examples. For that reason, I have to make several things clear. Although it was true that the Attorney General in managing President Reagan's Commission on Pornography found that they had neglected to provide for an adequate report on children and pornography and asked me to prepare that for submission to the Department of Justice at the time they collected the report from the commission. But that isn't the whole story, because I came to Washington with a professional personal concern that I held long before my appointment as Surgeon General back in 1981. In other words, I brought that concern to the job and the Attorney General's request to me was very much in line with what I would have liked to do anyway.

Therefore, I had asked to come to Washington for this meeting, a number of people from within and outside the government. I chose each of them by name, because of the importance of the subject and relied on an invitation from of the Surgeon General to get them there. I also wanted to remove any bias and I pressed into service, as the moderator, Dr. Alberto Serrano, the director of the Child Guidance Clinic at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

My remarks were really explanatory in how to accomplish our objective, which was the framing of a consensus as to what be believed to be pornography's impact on public health in America, but especially on the public health of children and young people. So, this occasion was not only something to help the Attorney General, but it was a benchmark for the Public Health Service. I announced my intent to send a final report not only to the Attorney General but also to my colleagues in the Public Health Service and elsewhere in the Department of Health and Human Services, the leadership of the Custom Service, the FBI, and the Postal Service who are also

concerned with this issue, and finally to the public in general in whose name all this work was being done. The meeting was closed to the public, but the results would not be kept from them.

I did acknowledge that I'd been warned that my involvement in this subject was a "no win" situation and I also acknowledged that over the past several months, I had been profoundly criticized by both liberals and conservatives for my involvement in the subject. The former warned of the threat to our civil liberties posed by the workshop on the other hand, conservatives assumed that this was just another forum for people who wanted to destroy every vestige of morality in our society. They were both wrong. I anticipated our discussions would be profoundly moral, and I ignored their complaints, although, I have to admit you usually have the liberals or the conservatives on your side and it's a tougher situation when they're both against you, even if for different reasons.

The charge was simple: first, what do we know with some degree of certainty about the affects of pornography on the physical and mental health of our people especially children and adolescents? Second, what kinds of things do we still need to know? In other words, what is the research agenda for the future? And finally, as professionals in public health and medicine, what do we think ought to be done next?

The children and adolescents that I met in the course of this study whose lives had been severely altered by their exposure to pornography – especially those who had been caught up in pornographic rings for the profit of some mean spirited adults, convinced me, that not only were we on the right track, but that some of our deliberations led to acts by our government that improved the lot of these youngsters.